

# FAMILY VOICES®

National Center for  
Family Professional Partnerships



## PROMISING PRACTICES IN CULTURAL COMPETENCE: Families Together, Inc. (KANSAS)

### FAMILIES TOGETHER, INC.

As the Family-to-Family Health Information Center in Kansas, *Families Together*, reaches out to families from all backgrounds, working with community leaders to support families who are in need of health-related services. **In the past 7 years Families Together estimates that agency staff have touched the average of 34,000 families and professionals each year, via newsletters, workshops, trainings, events and one-on-one interactions.** On average, 33% of those served by *Families Together* are from diverse backgrounds.

### KANSAS COMMUNITIES

The population of Kansas has become increasingly diverse. The 2010 US Census shows that Hispanics are now the largest minority group, a 59.4% growth from the previous census in 2000. The Asian population has grown by 44.6%. Kids Count Data shows an increase of 20,000 children in immigrant families from 2009 to 2013. These trends are similar for CSHCN. The NS-CSHCN shows an increase of 32,310 Hispanic CSHCN from the 2005/06 survey to the 2009/10 survey with a decrease in white non-Hispanic CSHCN of 8,425 across the 2 surveys.

In 2013 Family Voices National Center for Family/Professional Partnerships held a series of focus groups to identify essential elements of cultural competence that help organizations reach and serve families of diverse backgrounds. These elements are: 1) language access; 2) office environment reflective of diversity; 3) supportive staff; 4) strategies to connect diverse families; and 5) opportunities for diverse families to provide feedback. *Families Together* exemplifies promising practices in cultural competence that address these elements, as shown below.

### ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS:

#### Provision of language access:

- A translation system is used at all events to allow integration of all families. Simultaneous translation is provided by a real-time interpreter to families using headsets. This system has the capability to be used throughout a large area so that families using the headsets are not segregated in one specific area.
- Materials and workshops are translated into Spanish.
- A Lending Library includes books in Spanish, the most common language of families served by *Families Together*. Thirty percent of library materials are available in Spanish.
- *Families Together* website, which includes their online newsletter, is available in 90 languages.
- Facebook is employed to reach and share information with diverse families.

- Events are advertised on Spanish radio stations and in Spanish newspapers.
- Presentations made by *Families Together* staff are sensitive to cultural norms and address the needs of the audience.
- A statewide Spanish call-in phone line provides access to one-to-one assistance from Spanish-speaking staff.
- A language access network has been developed through partnerships with other service providers, school liaisons, and parent groups, such as a group who provided translation in Vietnamese at a recent conference.
- All staff have access to glossaries of commonly used terms in English and Spanish.

#### **Office environments reflect the diversity of families:**

- Office space displays materials and graphics welcoming to families of diverse cultures.

#### **Staff and partnerships reflect diverse populations:**

- Each of three *Families Together* offices has a bi-lingual (Spanish/English) person on staff.
- A Minority Outreach Team, comprised of staff members and leaders from different cultural backgrounds, oversees and monitors ongoing outreach efforts through monthly conference calls.
- All staff members participate in Cultural Awareness training as part of new staff orientation. Additional trainings are provided as needed.
- *Families Together* staff are members of advisory boards representing diverse populations. They reach out to cultural leaders to understand family dynamics and traditions.
- Staff collaborate with the Mexican Consulate in Western Kansas. This partnership provides guidance to address training needs for the immigrant Mexican population.
- *Families Together* contracts with culturally and linguistically diverse trainers who are experienced in outreach to diverse communities. They provide information and training on topics that include: Behavior Interventions, Special Education Law, School Partnerships, Health Literacy, and Stress Management.
- School liaisons are used to reach American Indians. Typically these liaisons are school staff members who communicate directly with the family or community leader. *Families Together* staff work with the liaisons to get information and resources to families.

#### **Connecting families to other families with shared experiences & similar backgrounds:**

- *Families Together's* statewide database for matching parents to other parents includes family culture as a criteria.
- Staff participate in and help to facilitate events, such as conferences, family enrichment weekends, barbecues, fiesta parades, and health fairs, to bring together families of similar cultures and backgrounds, providing opportunities for families to network and share experiences.
- New families learn about the services of Families Together through a policy that encourages all participants to “bring a friend.”

#### **Providing opportunities for diverse families to share their opinions and feedback:**

- *Families Together* provides encouragement, mentoring, and ongoing support for all families to participate on the *Families Together* Family Advisory Council and Board of Directors, the Kansas Department of Health & Environment, Independent Living Boards, and the State Assistive Technology Board. Families are also mentored to understand the importance of being a positive voice for their children.
- Stories and articles of families of diverse backgrounds are included in *Families Together* newsletters, which are disseminated to 12,663 families and professionals.
- Spanish-speaking families provide pre-publication review of *Families Together* materials such as the *Caring Notebook*. They also provide feedback on materials during the Spanish Family Enrichment Weekends.
- A language access plan survey collects feedback on program activities and materials from families of diverse background.

#### **LESSONS LEARNED:**

In addition to understanding the culture, and speaking the language of diverse populations, staff must understand that the perceptions and acceptance of disabilities vary greatly in different cultures. To work effectively, staff must respect the families' views and provide support and training according to the needs and views of those families.

Culture has implications far broader than just a difference in the spoken language. It takes ongoing attention and learning to be able to understand different cultural norms and their importance to the work of *Families Together*. For example, an event may be advertised as starting at 8:00, but, in some cultures, this may mean that families should arrive at 9:00. Some cultures define “Family” to include additional members beyond immediate family which may differ from the service organizations definition of family.

*Families Together* identifies some concrete steps to ensure the success of programs serving families of diverse backgrounds.

## STEPS FOR SUCCESS

Demonstrate the commitment of your organization to serving the unique needs of each family
Hire staff of diverse backgrounds.
Provide ongoing diversity training for all staff.
Research and identify other cultures within the communities you serve; seek to find respected leaders from within those communities, and make connections with those leaders to obtain permission and assistance in reaching out to their communities.
Focus on building trust as a number one priority in working with a new community.
Build and nurture partnerships with other organizations.

### WHAT FAMILIES SAY:

*My name is Hortensia and I have a child with a disability. His name is Cristian. He is 23 years old and he has Down syndrome. Throughout the years and at every stage of my son's life and for each gathering, I thank Families Together for getting the information I need, the support group, and Family Enrichment weekends. Families Together is very important to the Hispanic community. Thanks to the Spanish speaking staff. It is very easy to talk to them.*



*My name is Dr. Anita Raghavan. I am an Asian American mother, a widow and a professional. I have a step son with autism, and a biological son with Down syndrome and a hearing loss. In the 18 years that I have known Families Together, they have assisted me in finding resources; helped me attend conferences and learning events; given me advocacy training; and assisted me in my professional work. Additionally Families Together provides information to participants at the annual Asian Health and Wellness Fair.*



is a Family Voices State Affiliate Organization and a Family-to-Family Health Information Center.

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